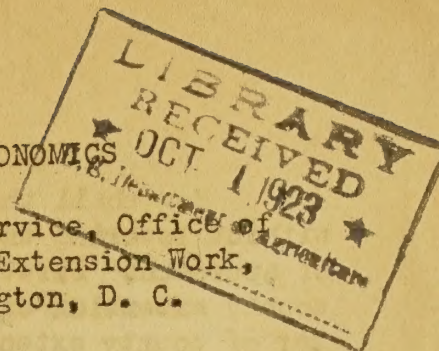


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COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS

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STATUS OF BOYS' AND GIRLS' CLUB WORK

(A paper presented by Ivan L. Hobson at the conference of extension workers from the Northeastern States, New Haven, Conn., February 21 to 24, 1923.)

Extension work with boys and girls originated from the desire to keep young people on the farm. Out of this idea have evolved two generally accepted functions; one is to train young people in approved practices in agriculture and home economics, the other is to help establish these approved practices as general practices in the community through the example of the boys and girls. To maintain a proper balance between these objectives is sometimes a problem. Some have held that the teaching of young people is the main purpose, while others believe that the immediate improvement of agriculture and homes is the principle function of extension work. On analysis, however, we find that each is a complement of the other, that they are inseparable, that the work becomes a higher type of education when it must stand the test of comparison with the average practice of the community, that it becomes strong demonstration work only when the teaching process is sound. The completeness with which these two principles have been carried out to date and the rate of progress being made should afford measuring sticks that determine the status of boys' and girls' club work.

Training Boys and Girls.

Any system of education that endures, that would secure the largest result with a given effort, that permits the use of knowledge and experience over the greatest period of time, must begin with the child when he is most impressionable and his mind is most plastic. Iron while in a molten condition may be shaped into almost any form. After it has cooled, the file must be used to change its form, and filing is a slow process. As long as imperfect castings exist, it will be necessary to use the file, but today is an opportune time to consider the practicability of beginning now to prevent an unnecessarily large number of imperfect castings by giving greater attention to the metal while in the malleable condition.

At our present rate of training boys and girls, what effect on the rural life of the nation can we expect in 15 or 50 years from now? What proportion of the men and women entering the business of farming or farm home making will have received this practical training?

Each year the country requires 260,000 new farm operators. If extension work were to give a reasonable period of training, say four years, to each boy who eventually becomes one of these farm operators, it would be necessary to enroll about 1,400,000 each year. But in 1922 about 165,000 boys carried out club enterprises to completion which is but 12 per cent of the number required by the country.

How shall the extension system go about it to reach more boys and girls without lowering the quality of the training. There seem to be but two roads of approach. First, to increase the number of club members supervised by each county extension agent in the present force, and second, to increase the number of county extension agents. What is the potentiality of the present force of agents? In the 10 Northeastern States the average number of members completing enterprises under county agricultural agents reporting such work was 44; under home demonstration agents, 61; and under county club agents, 446. All these figures compare favorably with other sections of the United States. Should we expect that the 116 county agents and 45 home demonstration agents in counties of the Northeastern States having no club agents may jointly increase the amount of club work to a figure somewhere near that of the club agent?

There are 143 county agent counties in which no club work is being conducted. There are 17 home demonstration agent counties in which there is no extension work with juniors. These facts may indicate channels for increasing the volume of work with the present forces.

The other means of extending the work consists in increasing the number of county extension agents. Inasmuch as most of the agricultural counties of the United States now have one agent, any appreciable increase must come through the placing of second and third agents in counties. It is a noteworthy fact that while 17 per cent of the county extension agents are club agents, yet the latter enrolled 73 per cent of all club members. The gradual increase of county club agents in the States represented here indicate that the means has been found whereby a maximum number of boys and girls may receive the benefits of extension work.

What is the quality of the training now being given to the 600,000 boys and girls of the United States who engaged in enterprises last year? Is the extension system turning out a better product than it did last year and five years ago? Are our teaching methods more effective? Are extension teachers better qualified? Are there more extension workers whose training and experience fit them particularly for the training of youths? Are those who have received such training and who last year entered their life's work better prepared than those former members who took up gainful occupations five years ago?

Means of determining these facts are indeed limited, but those available may afford an index. The average tenure of office of State club workers of 48 States in 1922 was about 5 years, probably the longest since the inauguration of the movement. The average tenure for county club agents, or extension agents giving their entire time to boys and girls increased slightly, reaching its highest point. No accurate figures are available to determine the number of years which other extension agents and State specialists have been engaged in work with young people. Considering only those agents and specialists who have made club work a part of their program each year, certainly their total experience in those activities has increased. But each year a considerable number of agents and specialists who have engaged in no junior work previously, undertake it for the first time. In addition there is a rapid turn-over among all

agents. Thus the total experience of all extension workers in club work the past two or three years has probably decreased slightly.

We are confronted with the fact that there are now more county extension agents and State specialists, conducting club work, who were not appointed specifically for that job and who are not familiar with junior work, than in past years. Just now there is a tremendous demand on the part of the public for this type of education with young people, and a growing desire on the part of county extension agents to undertake it. The movement has been cumulative until now it is taxing the effort of the system.

An index to this public approval is to be found in such facts as the following: Last year the public contributed nearly half a million dollars to club members in awards as recognition of accomplishment. The sum represents an increase of 12 per cent over 1921. Bankers loaned about \$1,500,000 to club members with which to purchase livestock, seed and equipment, a sum larger than any previous year in spite of the depression. County, State, and interstate fair associations increased their support. In one State, the State association of county fairs passed a resolution that each of the 82 counties would provide a minimum of \$500 for club work. A body of the Nations' prominent men, representing many kinds of business, have formed an organization to give moral support to the work. In New England, a type of education similar to club work has been provided for city boys and girls. All these movements, indicate widespread approval of club work.

Because of the youthfulness of extension work, the value of this training has in the past been a theory largely. But recently a considerable number of those who were club members 10 or 12 years ago have reached maturity and it is now possible to trace the positive influence of the work. This tangible, cumulative evidence is, apparently, one cause of the present popularity of the work.

Many agents and specialists are willingly responding to this demand even though they may be unfamiliar with suitable methods, for they appreciate the opportunity to accomplish their purpose through club work. But there is a large number not yet active in it. In some States, the State club workers, whose duty it is to insure good extension teaching of young people, are facing the problem of giving as much time per county as in the past and to an ever increasing number of counties. To give less time to each endangers the existing standards. To insure a gradual raising of standards, without corresponding increase in the tenure of county extension agent positions, will require an increasing amount of help from State club workers. If we could assume we have reached the height of efficiency, the problem would not be serious. Even in an old established system, such as public schools, the amount of supervision is increasing each year. But in extension work with boys and girls there has been a national decrease in the number of State and assistant State club workers.

It is evident that in those States where the quality of boys' and girls' club work has been maintained or improved, the number of State club workers has kept pace, first, with the increasing number of county extension agents and specialists familiar with methods of teaching youths, second, with the rate of change in personnel of agents, and third, with the replacement of junior specialists in subject-matter by specialists to serve both adult and junior.

We cannot afford to use methods that permit a boy forming life habits to form the habit of failure. We cannot afford to conduct extension work that unconsciously sacrifices the ultimate good of the girl for the immediate gain of the household.

Extension teaching may, in some respects, be less difficult than other types. The demand is created before the goods are offered. Once a boy or girl has undertaken an enterprise, he finds immediately that he needs certain information to successfully carry it out. A market has been created for the wares of the State college of agriculture and the U. S. Department of Agriculture. But because such a market is easily created, let us not assume that the seller need not know his market. Only a product of top grade suited to this particular terminal is thinkable. A surplus surely creates a slump and recovery is slow. There is an obligation to extend sound information in the form and in such quantity that a young mind will receive it eagerly and use it successfully.

Demonstrating Approved Practices

Extension work that culminates with the club member fails to consider the immediate improvement of rural conditions. But when a practice employed by the member not only results in a better product or more economical production than obtained on the home farm or the average farm of the community, and when this practice is extended to the home farm or neighboring farms, the result of extension effort is multiplied many fold. Should we assume that every completed enterprise is a demonstration? Do we assume that the spread of desirable practices takes place automatically and without further attention, or do we consciously extend the practices? What proportion of the boys and girls in the work improve on the local practices? How many farms and farm homes made changes last year as the result of club work?

In lieu of statistical answers for some of these questions, a cross-section of the methods employed will serve as partial answers.

Extension work in the community consists in first, determining what problems shall be attacked; second, carrying out work designed to show how the problems may be met; and third, securing a wide adoption of the practices demonstrated.

Determining the Lines of Extension Activity in the Community.

There are three main factors now in use for determining what farm, home and community problems shall be attacked: namely, the State extension program, the study and observations of the agent, and the desire of the people including that of the boys and girls. All of these play a part in arriving at a sound community program. Applying these facts to extension work with boys and girls, it is found that a change from former methods is taking place. Originally there was little relation between the activities of young people and adults. The State office submitted a list of club projects. The boys and girls were called upon to choose from the list those lines they were most interested in. Possibly the number of lines were restricted and possibly not. Not always were the selected lines of importance to the agriculture of the community. In some States a sequence of projects was adopted and the boys and girls of all communities were

expected to carry out the same three or four projects in a particular order in three or four consecutive years. Such a plan forbids adaptation to local needs and local wishes. Until recently it has been assumed that a club member demonstrates all the practices involved in the enterprise. Such a theory now seems unsound because people change their habits one at a time and a complex array of practices shown makes but small impression. Again, each member of a club may actually show the value of some one practice, yet it may be different from those of the other members of the group, resulting in shot-gun methods of reaching the community as a whole.

Determining the Local Problems and the Corresponding
Extension Undertakings.

County extension agents have remedied many of these weaknesses by studying all available statistics that are helpful, observing more analytically the existing conditions and their trend, by making adaptations to the State program, by securing an expression from the farm people, finally evolving a sound long-time community program in which all members of the family may engage. In this way, a concentration of all forces is possible. All the boys and girls of a club are able to center special attention on one or two specific practices which show up in the final product of the enterprise, and which exert a greater influence on the community as a whole. Such a method involves no depreciation in the amount or kind of information given, or in the enterprise as a whole. As the result of adopting these methods in a large number of counties the past year or two, demonstration work has become more effective.

Methods of carrying out the program with juniors have become somewhat standardized. There are, however, a few phases involved in the carrying out of a program which in parts need strengthening. The question has been raised - how large should the enterprise be in order to be convincing? It is probable that the average size of poultry enterprises is too small. A half dozen pullets is not enough to convince the average farmer that a particular method of feeding is best. A second factor is the volume of work in the community on a given line. No information is available to determine what spread per member may be expected but it goes without saying that the larger the number of members to a given area the more quickly will the impression be made on the area.

Ten years has seen great progress in the quality and quantity of volunteer local leadership for clubs. Each year has seen increasing attention given to the ability of the leader, to his permanent residence in the community, to his training and to securing more leadership. In 1922, there were 13,336 local leaders in 32 States. As club members grow to maturity they are serving as local leaders, with the result that the supply is gradually increasing. There is a growing need for more training conferences and for help in planning each leader's job.

The third stage of the extension job in the community, namely, securing a wide adoption of the practices shown, has probably received less attention than any other phase. We may have assumed too much that this spread would take place automatically without any effort on our part. The means whereby results of demonstrations may be broadcasted, such as by demonstration teams, exhibits, tours and publicity, have been developed throughout the country but they have not been used to as good purpose as may be.

Demonstration teams, tours in the community, exhibits designed to tell the story of the demonstration, community meetings to present the summary of results and concentrated campaigns, can be so used as to bring about changes rapidly. During the past year, several States have undertaken to make surveys to determine how many farmers are influenced by demonstrations carried out by the club members. When enough of these have accumulated, it will be possible to determine just how efficiently boys' and girls' club work is serving as true demonstration work.

There is a gradual expansion of the activities of boys and girls to a greater variety of farm and home enterprises. Farm management, home management, orcharding, beekeeping and rural engineering enterprises are the recent additions. While there are obstacles to overcome in fitting these to boys and girls, persistence is bringing results. There may be a place for work in forestry among young people, especially in some of the New England States.

A study of annual reports for 1922 reveals the fact that there are several times as many boys and girls engaged in livestock enterprises as in crop work. No doubt this is due partly to the fact that the members' interest is more easily maintained in livestock work than with crops. But certainly there are important crop problems needing attention. As the period of training for club members increases, it is to be hoped that soil building or crop rotation enterprises may be undertaken.

Summing up the status of club work we find that-

(1) Extension forces are reaching about 4 per cent of the rural boys and girls 14 to 20 years of age, and are training about one-eighth of the number required annually as new farmers.

(2) The quality of the work is being maintained or improved in the States where the number of State club workers is maintained in proportion (a) to the number of county extension agents and specialists who are not familiar with junior methods, (b) to the increasing number of club agents and (c) to the replacement of junior specialists in subject-matter by specialists who serve both adult and junior.

(3) Where all work is conducted through a single community program, practices are established more readily.

(4) Boys' and girls' club work is most effective in improving rural conditions, and the quality of training the members receive is of the highest type, when a specific practice is demonstrated by all members of a club at the same time.

(5) There is a healthy tendency to increase the kinds of farm and home enterprises in order to take a more complete part in community activities.

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